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Brzezinski Keeps His Cool

He defends talking with Billy

Senator Strom Thurmond: We're trying to get the truth, but we're not sure you're telling it.

Zbigniew Brzezinski: Excuse me, Senator. You may not be sure. I know I'm telling the truth.

That acerbic exchange was the high—or low—point of an eight-hour sparring match last week between the special Senate subcommittee investigating Billy Carter's profitable dealings with the Libyans and Brzezinski, who became the first National Security Adviser ever to testify before Congress.

The subcommittee wanted to know why in November he had used the President's none too diplomatic brother as a go-between to arrange talks at the White House with the Libyans about the American hostages in Tehran. Brzezinski replied that at the time, the White House was desperately searching for help in any quarter to free the hostages. He felt that using Billy was worth a try since Arab societies tend to put blood ties above formal positions in government. In fact, after Brzezinski met with Ali Houderi, Libya's top diplomat in Washington, the Libyan government issued a statement condemning the Iranian action. That move, Brzezinski claimed, "certainly prevented the jelling of a radical front at the time." He felt that it may have saved American lives.

Skeptical Senators wondered if Billy gained anything from his diplomatic mission. Vermont Democrat Patrick Leahy asked if the "effect of the meeting, intended or not, was to enhance the commercial value of Billy Carter." Replied Brzezinski, clearly bristling: "Our motive was not to help Billy Carter but to help the hostages." Billy served as "another limited source of leverage." At the time he asked for Billy's assistance, the Na-

tional Security Adviser said, he was unaware of the First Brother's business links with the Libyans.

The Senators wanted to know why Brzezinski felt free to use information from a classified CIA report in warning Billy that his actions in Libya might embarrass the Administration. Brzezinski explained that on receiving the damaging report from CIA Director Stansfield Turner, he pondered the matter over lunch in his office, then concluded that "I would serve the President better if I first admonished Billy." According to Brzezinski, the President later told him, "You did the right thing." There was no breach of security, said Brzezinski, nor did he risk revealing the source of the CIA's information. Said Brzezinski: "Lots of people knew about Billy's business attempts, and certainly he did."

Not satisfied with this explanation, South Carolina Republican Thurmond complained that Brzezinski appeared to have been acting as the President's "political troubleshooter." Visibly tensing and almost spitting out his words, Brzezinski replied: "I consider that to be a highly improper insinuation, and it doesn't adequately or accurately describe my motives—to protect the national interest."

While Brzezinski was an open and often persuasive witness, some of his interrogators thought some of his actions were symptomatic of an Administration in disarray. Said Maryland Republican Charles Mathias: "It seems to me that we're dealing with a series of innocent blunders, but they all add up to an appearance of incompetence." With Brzezinski the committee's last public witness, the Democrats are in a hurry to wrap up the investigation by the subcommittee's Oct. 4 deadline and get Billy out of the news.

But that may prove difficult. Still another of Billy's business ventures was disclosed last week. Billy and a California businessman, Terry Barnes, have been peddling souvenir \$2 bills and Inaugural envelopes bearing facsimiles of the President's signature for \$150 each. The entrepreneurs aim to gross as much as \$5.5 million. Barnes has already sold 13,000 of the envelopes, even though dealers say their real value is no more than \$12. ■